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Numerical Features of the Book of Obadiah

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Numerical Features of the Book of Obadiah

Please read the [General Introduction](#)

Various views on the structural design of Obadiah

- J. MUILENBURG (Obadiah, Book of, in: IDB, 1962): 1a; 1b; 2-4; 5-7; 8-10; 11-14.15b; 15a.16-18; 19-21.
H.W. WOLFF (*Dodekaton 3: Obadja und Jona*, in: BKAT, 1977): 1a; 1b-14.15a; 15b-21.
P.R. ACKROYD (Obadiah, Book of, in: ABD, 1992): 1a; 1b-7; 8-14; (15).16-21.
C. VAN LEEUWEN (*Obadja*, in POT, 1993): 1a; 1b-4; 5-7; 8-9; 10-14.15b; 15a.16-21.
P.R. RAABE (*Obadiah*, in The Anchor Bible, 1996): 1a; 1b-4; 5-7; 8-18; 19-21.
D.A. DORSEY (*The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, pp. 290-295): Seven parts: 1-4; 5-7; 8-11; **12-14**; 15-16; 17-18; 19-21.
J. RENKEMA (*Obadiah*, in: HCOT, 2003): 1a; 1b; 2-4 | 5-6; 7 | 8-10; 11-12 | 13-14; 15-16 | 17-18; 19-21.
K. SPRONK ("Joël, Obadja, Nahum, Zefanja, Haggai, Zacharia, Maleachi", in: *De Bijbel literair*, Onder redactie van Jan Fokkelman en Wim Weren, Zoetermeer/Kapellen, 2003, 299): 1-4; 5-7; 8-15; 16-18; 19-21.
D. STUART (*Hosea-Jonah*, in: WBC 31, 1987, 401-422): 1a; 1b; 1b-9b; 9b-14; 15-21.
NOGALSKI (*The Book of the Twelve: Hosea-Jonah*, in: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary 18a, Macon GA, 2011, 367-397): I: 1-5; 6-7; 8-14; II: 15b,a + 16-21.
K. SPRONK ("Obadja onder de profeten", in: *Schrift*, 271, April 2014): 1-4; 5-7; 8-15; 16-18; 19-21.

Structural design based on content and numerical considerations

The booklet is a well-planned, meticulously designed numerical composition in three parts.

Heading	1a	2		2	In Obadiah the heading stands apart!
Vs.	Text	Words	YHWH	Sum words	Structural design
1	1b	16	1-2	16	The background: A messenger is sent among the nations
2	2	7		23	§1: 2-8 YHWH's intention to bring Edom down 2-5 Because of the pride of Edom's heart, YHWH will bring Edom down: highlighted by 51 (3x17) words . 6-8 Edom's allies have deceived him and YHWH will destroy his wise men: highlighted by 34 (2x17) words . Therefore the paragraph is emphasized by 85 words .
3	3	13		36	
4	4	12	3	48	
5	5	19		67	
6	6	5		72	
7	7	18		90	§2: 9-14 Esau is confronted with his atrocities 9-11 The violence Esau has done to his brother Jacob is highlighted by means of 34 (2x17) words . 12 Edom should not have gloated over Judah's ruin: 17 w . Until this point (1b-13 and 1b-14) the text is rounded off, and sealed by 170 and 182 (7x26) words respectively.
8	8	11	4	101/85	
9	9	9		110	
10	10	7	34 (2x17)	117	
11	11	18		135	
12	12	17		152	§3: 15-21 Esau will be repaid and Jacob will prevail 17-21 There will be a remnant on Mount Zion and Jacob will survive and dispossess those that dispossessed them. The house of Jacob will regain its possessions and rule Mount Esau , while the kingdom is YHWH's: 78 words .
13	13	18		170	
14	14	12		182/81	
15	15	14	5	196	
16	16	15		211	
17	17	11		222	
18	18	21	6	243	
19	19	18	78 (3x26)	261	
20	20	17		278	
21	21	11	7	289/107	
21	1b-21	289 (17x17)	7x	289 (17x17)	The book is finalized and sealed by 289 (17x17) words .

Observation 1 The book itself, excluding the **2-word heading**, is made up of **289 (17x17)** words, by which the presence of YHWH in the events described in the book is symbolically raised to the square. The compositional unity of the book, as well as the presence of YHWH, are reinforced by the string of **7** instances of the Name YHWH and the **7** instances of the name Esau (vs. 6, 8b, 9b, **18a**, 18b, 19a, 21a), with v. 18a in pride of place at the focal point of emphasis: *“The house of Esau shall be stubble; they shall burn them and consume them”*.

Observation 2 The words in 2-21 are ascribed to YHWH, strictly according to the introductory words in 1b: *“Thus says Adonay YHWH concerning Edom”*. Most significantly the divine speech begins with **51 (3x17)** words in 2-5 and ends with **78 (3x26)** in 17-21, in line with the remarkable phenomenon that a holy book begins and/or ends with **17** or **26** words or one of their multiples. [See my article](#). Since it deals with Esau, it is not surprising to find that the first **51** words (2-5) refer symbolically to Edom by means of the positional value of the four letters of **אֶדוֹם**: 1+4+6+40=**51 (3x17)**. This means that the book bears the ‘signature’ of the main character, Edom. For this conspicuous literary device, see pages 17-18 in the [General Introduction](#).

The first paragraph of the divine speech (2-8) is made up of **51+34=85 (5x17)** words. The third, concluding paragraph (15-21) has 107 words, and, excluding the 3-word referring formula *ki YHWH dibber*, ‘for YHWH has spoken’ (18b), it consists of **104 (4x26)** words. All this shows how the name of YHWH (representing his presence) has been woven into the fabric of the text by means of the divine name numbers **17** and **26**.

Observation 3 Since 1b-5 and 8 contain similar ideas as in Jeremiah 49,14-16, the author of Obadiah must have been familiar with the Edom-passage in Jeremiah 49,7-22 and presumably with Jeremiah’s prophecy against the foreign nations in 46-51 in its entirety. This goes of course also for Ezekiel’s prophecies against Edom (Ez. 25,12-14 and 35,1-15) and for Isaiah 34,1-17. The words *“a messenger has been sent among the nations”* in Ob. 1,1b is clearly a citation from Jer. 49,14.

Most significant about the nations in the book of Jeremiah is the fact that it deals with **9** nations in a row, with **Edom** positioned in pride of place at the centre (**9 = 4+1+4**): Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, **Edom**, Damascus, the Arabs, Elam, and finally Babylonia). This means that Edom was regarded as Israel’s enemy par excellence. No wonder that a separate book was devoted to the atrocities of the Edomites in the day of Israel’s calamity. In this respect it is, in my opinion, not a matter of coincidence that Obadiah contains a list of **9** bad things that Esau has done to his brother Jacob at the downfall of Jerusalem (11-14):

1. On that day you *stood aloof* on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
2. You should not have *gloated* over the day of your brother in the day of his misfortune,
3. You should not have *rejoiced* over the people of Judah in the day of their ruin,
4. You should not have *boasted* in the day of distress,
5. **You should not have entered the gate of my people in the day of his calamity,**
6. You should not have *gloated* over his disaster in the day of his calamity,
7. You should not have *looted* his goods in the day of his calamity,
8. You should not have *stood* at the parting of the ways to cut off his fugitives,
9. You should not have *delivered up* his survivors in the day of distress.

The worst act of violence that the Edomites committed is consciously positioned at the centre of the list as the focal point of attention: they violated the integrity and privacy of Jacob by entering the gate of the city of Jerusalem (13). This deed is underlined by the fact that Jacob is explicitly called ‘my people’, which means that this act of violence concerns YHWH too.

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